

## Community Engagement Panel- November 11th, 2021

### **The members of the panel included:**

Daria Gere,	Executive Director WATCH CDC
Kristin Barbieri	VP Stewardship Weston Forest & Trails/Weston Owl Blog
Alison _____	New Weston School Committee member
John Gibbons	Weston Middle School Principal
Julie Secord	Director - Council on Aging - Wayland, MA
Migonne Murray	Director - Council on Aging - Weston, MA

### **Council on Aging (COA) perspective:**

- continued growth in older populations both towns
- COA trying to do better job increasing awareness of resources they provide
- senior housing options and transportation greatest challenge
- silver lining of pandemic is technology has expanded reach to seniors
- 3000 residents of Weston are 60+, close to 40% will soon be 50+
- permanent space is a major problem for Wayland Council on AgingOA

### **School Principal perspective:**

- Pandemic has been the two most challenging years of his career
- declining school enrollment (tracks with aging Weston population)
- hyper-vigilant communication needs
- green initiatives top of mind
- more progressive learning methods
- impact of technology
- equitable and racial equity focus
- teaching teachers to “nano learn”
- long term impact of virtual learning challenges

### **School Committee perspective:**

- 20 years in town
- have seen major changes in last 5 years in how we communicate with one another from a civic responsibility role
- extended support beyond the Weston community
- looking for ways to partner with other towns
- people are looking for ways to make an impact
- looking ahead: step up to enact change & more civic involvement

### **Land Stewardship/Owl perspective:**

- amount of volunteers and volunteerism hasn't changed
- concern about losing some of the "titans" of open space, pioneers of rail trail etc.
- local media is becoming non-existent
- over next five years looking to increase use of existing trails and to provide more trails

### **Daria from WATCH perspective:**

- 50% of Waltham residents rent their residences
- tremendous immigrant population
- younger population
- 10% live in poverty
- Waltham school population: 42% white/40% Hispanic/10% African/5% Asian
- dramatic increases in rent leading to growing housing insecurity: 2014 1 BR \$1700 ... 2019 1 BR \$2100
- Waltham "gentrification" good and bad ..... pricing out low income families

### **Overall observations shared between panel**

- volunteerism is down: same volunteers working more hours
- gap between have and have-nots is widening
- public space need vs. private space challenge
- detrimental impact of pandemic on social, mental health needs of all students
- seniors needs increasing
- Seniors would take advantage of transportation if we provided it to go to church
- COA could/would take advantage of our space
- interest in multi-faith activities for kids
- kids are over-programmed

### **Silver lining of pandemic?**

- pushed ourselves to think differently
- ability to communicate via zoom has opened up new channels and increased participation

### **Optimism for Future:**

- depth of volunteerism/vast network of organizations
- churches can be a liaison for COA in identifying people in need
- kids are the future/listening to them may bring more engagement
- kids are initiating programs like BLM, new environmental causes starting up

### **How can St. Peter's help?**

- find ways to bring kids together for service projects
- get kids connected more to the outdoors
- find ways to connect kids that “have” to the “have-nots”
- build bridges to other, more diverse communities
- speakers series
- normalize aging/intergenerational programs

### **How to reach the community:**

- OWL (Weston)
- Wayland Community News (Facebook)
- Facebook
- Social Media